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ago, d/a ltr, 29 apr 1980

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat)
APO San Francisco 96257



31 October 1966

SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned for Quarterly Period Ending
31 October 1966

THRU: Commanding Officer
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APO US Forces 96491

Commanding General
18th Engineer Brigade
APO US Forces 96307

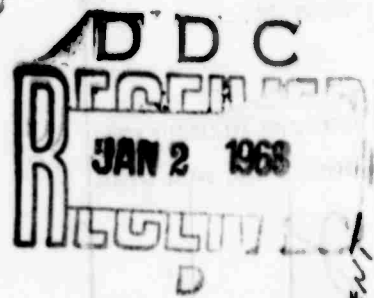
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APO US Forces 96307

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Section I: Significant Organization or Unit Activities.

A. Unit History: The 27th Engineer Battalion traces its beginnings to the formation of the 2nd Battalion, 37th Engineer Regiment (Electrical and Mechanical) at Fort Myers, Virginia, on 16 January 1918. Subsequent to its formation, the battalion participated in and received battle credits for the Saint Miheil and Meuse-Argonne offensives, European Theater, World War I.

Upon deactivation at Fort Upton, New York, March 1919, the battalion was reorganized and redesignated 2nd Battalion, 27th Engineer Regiment (Combat) on 16 December 1935, although still in an inactive status.

Recalled to active duty on 14 July 1941 the unit, redesignated 2nd Battalion, 37th Engineer Combat Regiment, was to see combat in the Pacific Theater, World War II. On 18 March 1943 the unit was redesignated the 209th Engineer combat Battalion, moved to India and became part of the famous "Merrills Marauders". While engaged in the Burma campaign, the battalion worked on the Ledo Road and was instrumental in the capture of the MYITKYNIA Airfield. For its outstanding effort in this endeavor, the battalion was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. It also received battle credits for the India - Burma and Central Burma campaigns.

The battalion was returned to CONUS and inactive status in November 1945.

After several redesignations the battalion was finally designated the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) on 28 April 1951, and activated at Fort Campbell, Kentucky the following month. As a STRAC Unit, the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) earned the nickname "The Tiger Battalion" during 1960 while participating in field maneuvers. In April 1966 the "Tiger Battalion" was alerted for duty in the Republic of Vietnam. The battalion closed for staging in the Bien Hoa - Long Binh area on 1 October 1966.

At present A Company and C Company are deployed to Xuan Loc. B Company will move into Xuan Loc on 2 November 1966 and D Company was detached to the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division at Tan Linh on 2 November 1966 for an indefinite period. Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company will close Xuan Loc on or about 15 November 1966.

B. Preparation for Overseas Movement.

1. The battalion was alerted for duty in the Republic of Vietnam in April 1966. At that time the Readiness posture was:

(a) Personnel C-4

	<u>OFF</u>	<u>WO</u>	<u>EM</u>	<u>AGG</u>
Auth	37	3	769	809

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Assigned 23 2 407 432*
*107 of these were non-deployable. 85% MOS qualified.

(b) Equipment:

On hand C-4 79/62/04/00/13 (Auth lines/90%/80%/70%/70%-)
Servicability C-3 73/07/20 (Green/Amber/Red)

Major Shortages:	Auth	Short
Leader, scoop	13	10
Pneumatic tool compressor set 2500CFM	5	5
Water Purification Set 1500 GPM	5	1
Welding Shop, trl mtd.	1	1
Launcher, grenade M-79	83	53
Semi-trailer, 25 ton	10	3
Entire new family of radios		All

At the time of departure the posture of the battalion was:

Personnel:

	OFF	WO	EM	AGG
Auth	36	3	755	794
Assigned	36	3	663	702
90% were MOS qualified.				

Equipment:

On Hand C-4
Servicability C-3

Major Shortages:	Auth	Short
Leader, scoop	13	10
Pneumatic Tool Compressor Set 250 CEM	5	5
Water purification set 1500 CPM	5	1
Crane, rough terrain	1	1
Tool set, electrical	9	3

2. Movement:

a. C Company was alerted on 21 July 1966 to move in advance of the battalion in order to perform a special mission. The equipment was shipped on 25 July and the personnel departed by air, with RED and YELLOW TAT, on 12 August arriving 13 August. The equipment arrived 21 September. It should be noted that even though this unit was shipped to perform a special mission it required 28 days to be come operational due to the delayed arrival of equipment.

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The cause of this delay is not known by this unit.

b. The following dates were assigned the battalion for various time phases of movement:

	Original	Final
Personnel On Station Date (POSD)	10 Jun 66	10 Jun 66
Equipment Readiness Date (ERD)	9 Aug 66	15 Aug 66
Personnel Readiness Date (PRD)	15 Aug 66	1 Sep 66

c. Personnel. The Personnel on Station Date (POSD) was established by 3rd US Army 10 June. This POSD was not met, 29 Officer and approximately 400 enlisted men joined after the POSD. The unit departed short 92 EM. Assignment orders and DA messages directing assignments were unreliable. In many cases requisitions were not filled by grade. In others, individuals would arrive on the scene with a set of orders but with no reference to DA directives, necessitating many hours of communications with losing units throughout CONUS. Of 20 Non-Commissioned Officers assigned, only one joined.

Records were screened numerous times in order to satisfy the various inspection teams. This added workload on the personnel section, while it was engaged in personnel actions required to receive and ship some 550 personnel, could have been alleviated by having a standard CONARC records check immediately following the POSD, the training cycle and just prior to departure.

Non-deployables should be reassigned at least 15 days prior to unit departure. Unit is still awaiting orders on approximately 16 men left behind for various personnel actions. Morning Report corrections will continue until all are accounted for. Letters were sent to the Commanding General, Fort Campbell, Kentucky on 11 October 1966 and 21 October 1966 requesting follow-up action. To date no answer has been received.

(1) Leaves: In general all personnel had sufficient time to complete 15 days of leave. By early planning and scheduling the companies had the majority of their work force available during peak workload.

(2) Relocation of families: Post policy on available housing for dependents to remain in Government quarters was changed during the Preparation for Overseas Movement (POM). This placed additional burdens on several members of the unit who had been told that their dependents would be allowed to remain in Government quarters. The changing of the Personnel Readiness Date (PRD) also created many changes in plans. The post policy on moving off post created some financial burdens in that several members desiring to leave their dependents in the area had to rent prior to being allowed to clear Government quarters, thus, paying rent while losing quarters allowance. A clearly stated policy where by Government housing is or is not available and permitting deployable personnel in a D-1 unit to move off post at their convenience, would have alleviated much of this confusion.

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Post transportation was most helpful in arranging family moves once permission to clear quarters was established.

Many members where, of necessity, separated from their families from 15 to 45 days prior to the units departure. Family separation allowance and dislocation allowance were not paid at Fort Campbell thus creating unnecessary financial hardship on many members.

(3) Personal Problems: An early cutoff date should be established for the application for hardship discharges, compassionate reassignments, deferments, etc. Attempting to process this type action up to the day of departure increases the workload of the personnel section and the possibility of overlooking a legitimate request.

A team from the Post Adjutant Generals office assisted the Battalion in explaining and preparing wills and power of attorneys.

d. Logistics - This battalion was reorganized under the ECHO series TO&E in December 1965. All equipment required under the new TO&E was requisitioned at that time, however, some of the major items for D Company have not been received. Many other items, previously on hand, were diverted to other D-1 units prior to this units alert. Upon becoming D-1, all requisitions were resubmitted with a higher priority.

The shifting of the Equipment Readiness Date (ERD) caused some problems because many items were to come from manufacturer sources on given dates, most of which were not met, i.e., the new family of radios was scheduled for delivery on 13 July and finally arrived on 20 August, just in time to be packed in RED TAT.

PLL was no problem until the final days when authorization was received to increase Ordnance to 30 day and Engineer to 90 day levels. All requisitions were placed immediately but there was insufficient time for receipt of the supplies. Also the non-availability of specific makes and models of new equipment to be received prevented the requisitioning of PLL until the last minute for some items.

It is recommended that the advance party bring at least a 30 day supply of blank forms and office supplies and that the unit pack at least a 30 day supply in RED TAT.

It is recommended that deploying units be informed at the earliest date as much about their assignment as possible from the new higher headquarters and host unit.

e. Packing: It is recommended that hand tools such as saws, hammers, nails, levels and etc., be packed in sufficient quantity in RED TAT so as to assist

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the unit in unpacking and setting up their staging area. Having as much advance information on location and facilities in the staging area will greatly facilitate leading in home station i.e., knowing what to pack RED TAT vs. general cargo. It should be recognized by deploying units that RED TAT will not be available upon disembarking. This unit disembarked 1 October at Vang Tau and did not receive RED TAT. This means that personnel must live out of their A Bag until RED TAT is received. It is therefore recommended that the A Bag include sleeping and mess gear.

While packing CONEX's accurate packing lists should be distributed to necessary individuals in addition to those required by Transportation. Also duplicate keys should be on the person responsible for unpacking CONEX's.

CONEX's should be securely packed and blocking material of 2 x 4 or 2 x 6 used to prevent loads shifting during transport.

f. Training: Had the POSD been met this unit would have had sufficient time for an 8 week training cycle to cover all aspects of combat engineer training. Since the POSD was not met, the training cycle was finally slipped to four weeks of primarily Infantry training, physical fitness and POR required subjects. The weather at Fort Campbell was quite conducive to acclimatization as the average temperature was about 90 degrees. The unit underwent extensive foot marches, field exercises, communications exercises and physical training programs. Little time was available for basic engineering subjects although engineering projects were included in the field exercises. This lack of engineer training placed some handicap on the unit but it was prepared to defend itself and has been able to adjust to the climatic conditions readily.

g. Transportation: From a logistical viewpoint the submission of transportation requests well in advance is a very difficult estimate. It is better to estimate high as it is nearly impossible to get an increase at a later date.

This unit was required to keep all vehicles to a minimum profile, removing sideboards, headache boards, etc., and keeping all loads below the minimum silhouette. This required a great number of man hours to prepare the vehicles for shipment, and again prepare the vehicles for use. Another similar unit from another CONUS location did not have this restriction. Their vehicles arrived intact with headache boards in place and with loads as well as with company bumper numbers.

This unit devised a distinctive unit insignia which included the company letter which was placed on the drivers side of each vehicle and on two sides and the top of all CONEX's. This unit insignia was of great assistance identifying this units equipment and supplies.

The YELLOW TAT for the personnel section was insufficient. Only one field desk and one typewriter were available to prepare a payroll and reports required within the 1st week in country. The problems of hand carrying YELLOW TAT vs the bottleneck created by the lack of equipment are small.

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Definitive instructions are needed at least two weeks prior to port call to prepare the proper troop manifest for boarding the ship. Based on the information furnished, this unit prepared manifests for 536 men three times in five days and they were still of no use to Navy personnel in berthing and embarking troops. Port Transportation requirements did not meet Navy requirements.

The battalion equipment was self loaded at home station under the supervision of Post Transportation. This unit was required to ship heavy trailers by rail while the prime movers were shipped by road transport. This created a great deal of difficulty in loading rail cars. Consequently the equipment was shipped and received at the in country port in the same manner, trailers without prime movers. As the unit equipment arrived on 2 separate ships, some two weeks apart, this created an additional burden on the sponsoring unit.

The equipment arrived at Saigon Port in excellent condition. Some equipment was damaged in the 1st phases of unloading. This situation was corrected by having unit personnel closely supervise the remainder of the unloading.

h. Maintenance: It is recommended that all drivers be trained and tested in International road signs as well as rough terrain driving. "Vietnamese Traffic Signs With English Translations" are available by writing HEADQUARTERS, MACV, VIETNAM, APO SF 96243.

At least four general mechanic tool sets should be packed RED TAT as well as an ample supply of blank forms, especially DA Forms 2407, 2401, 2408-7 and 2765-1.

A new 2408-7 must be filled out on all items of equipment requiring this form. The bulk of the information can be put on before shipment and the remainder added in country.

Requisitions are prepared on DA Form 2765-1 in country. It is recommended that each unit bring an ample supply.

Units must be prepared to submit an up to date unit maintenance SOP shortly after arrival.

It is recommended that immediate contact be made with port authorities to determine the ship, docking time and unloading time of units equipment. RED TAT, and WABTOC, as each unit is responsible for removing its own supplies from the port.

As mechanics tools are not available in-country, units should bring full TOE plus any extras and thoroughly indoctrinate personnel in the safekeeping and maintenance of these tools.

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1. Inspections: Several POM Inspections are performed prior to shipment. This unit received a POM Inspection from the following agencies on the dates indicated:

Fort Campbell.....12, 21, & 26 July 1966
Third US Army.....11 August 1966
CONARC.....20 August 1966
DA Inspector General.....8 September 1966

Each time representatives of G1, G2, G3, and G4 were represented. Each time our shortages of personnel and equipment were presented, however, little was accomplished from a unit viewpoint.

3. ADVANCED PARTY: The advanced party, consisting of the Battalion Commander, Company Commanders, Sergeant Major, Maintenance Officer, Property Book Officer, Company Supply Sergeants, and assorted clerical personnel, (25 in all) departed Fort Campbell on 8 Sept 66 and arrived at Ton San Nhut Air Base on 10 Sept 66.

Once in country, the advanced party established contact with maintenance and logistics support units and arranged for receiving the main body. It was extremely beneficial to have company commanders in the advanced party as they were able to look at other projects, review standard plans, establish company policies based on in country regulations and receive their mission assignments. This minimized the time required to set the companies in operation once the personnel arrived.

It is recommended that at least one platoon sergeant from each line company accompany the advance party as most staging areas are "do it yourself".

4. MAIN BODY: The main body departed Fort Campbell in three increments the first consisting of 250 officers and men under the command of the battalion Executive Officer who had been designated Senior Unit Commander aboard the USNS Buckner, on 6 September, embarking the USNS Buckner immediately upon arrival in Oakland, California.

As other units arrived in Oakland they were immediately embarked. A voyage staff was assembled primarily from this unit for the initial phase of the voyage. The USNS Buckner departed San Francisco on the morning of 8 September with 749 Army personnel on board enroute to San Diego. The ship departed San Diego on 18 September with an equal number of marine personnel. The voyage staff was reorganized to include marine personnel to assist in the administration of the ship.

Training space was at a minimum and had to be strictly controlled to facilitate the on board training programs of all units. Except for one major incident, harmony was well maintained on board.

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After a one day layover in Okinawa to discharge passengers and refuel, the ship proceeded to Da Nang arriving 29 September where all Marine personnel were debarked. On 31 September the ship dropped anchor in Vung Tau. The unit debarked 1 October and was flown to Bien Hoa. From where the troops were housed and fed at the 90th replacement Battalion for three days until the unit RED TAT arrived.

On 4 October Headquarters Company, A Company and D Company staged in the 79th Engineer Group area while B Company staged at DI AN in the 168th Battalion (Combat) area.

5. SAFETY: During the confusion of receiving new personnel, training packing and moving safety becomes evermore important. Units preparing for overseas movement should establish a strong safety program specifically for the movement. Strong leadership and supervision are necessary at this time.

6. INFORMATION: Information about the type of work being done, personal items to bring, and particular items of equipment required were received from various sources.

The guide for preparation for overseas movement, AR 220-10, specifies what must be done. Letters from units and personnel in country as well as Lessons Learned Reports supplied additional information on what else should be done to better facilitate the move.

SECTION II: Lessons learned after Becoming Operational.

Part I. Observations:

1. Modifications necessary on standard tractors, full tracked, used in ample clearing.

DISCUSSION: When used in clearing virgin jungle, several problem areas have developed with standard tractor, full tracked medium. To assure operator safety and preclude equipment damage, a cab with sufficient strength and coverage should be provided to protect against falling limbs. Refuse accumulates rapidly against the face of the radiator if the rear ward blowing fan is mounted. The situation is helped somewhat by mounting the summer blade. Lastly, hydraulic lines are easily ripped off when operating in heavy brush. Either more heavily armored hoses should be used or cable operated blades be mounted.

OBSERVATION: Consideration should be given to modifying tractors, full tracked, medium to make them more adaptable to jungle operations.

ITEM: Use of Laterite During the Wet Season.

DISCUSSION: Laterite makes an excellent road surface when brought to optimum moisture content and compacted. Once compacted in place the material sheds water and remains fairly stable, however, during the wet season

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if the material is saturated with water it cannot be worked nor compacted. This is particularly true of the lower grades of laterite. It will quickly become a quagmire under traffic.

OBSERVATION: Equipment and vehicular traffic must be kept off laterite while it is above its optimum moisture content.

Part III. None.

CHARLES R. ROBERTS
LTC, CE
Commanding